

Gender inequality in online music production:

A qualitative content analysis comparison of online audiences' evaluation on cover performers of metal and popular music on YouTube

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is a current problem present throughout the music industry. There is a clear gap between men and women regarding the opportunities offered to acquire recognition and propel their music careers. Even though music consumption shifted to online spheres helping musicians to enter the music industry by covering songs and gaining broader audiences, these audiences still encourage certain gender stereotypes ingrained in metal and popular music. Therefore, this thesis analyses how online audiences evaluate cover artists in popular and music scenes to understand if gender inequality is still present in the online sphere and how it is displayed. Thus, a qualitative content analysis was conducted, specifically a thematic analysis of a total of 800 comments extracted from 40 cover songs of metal and popular music interpreted by both female and male artists. This was done to analyse if online audiences evaluate differently male and female cover artists. The main results showed that female metal covers' audiences encourage breaking with gender rules. However, female artists still need to show that they belong to the metal scene whereas audiences usually consider that men are already part of it. Regarding popular covers, female singers had to fulfil certain popular music stereotypes to gain recognition. On the other hand, male artists usually had to be good looking and good singers at the same time. In conclusion, the main meanings found showed that metal female cover artists are acknowledged and valued as metal singers, which facilitates their access to the music industry as they are able to construct symbolic capital. However, male dominance is still present in online audiences, as the results showed gender-biased evaluation based on certain ingrained male stereotypes. Overall, it is concluded that in popular music there are better opportunities to gain legitimacy and develop a professional career both for male and female musicians. However, sexualization and male gaze evaluation are still clearly present in online music scenes, making it harder for women to propel their music careers as they are subordinate to specific stereotypes. Finally, even though gender inequality is recurrent, the findings of this thesis show progress on lessening the gap as online audiences' evaluation can help female musicians to enter the music business.

KEYWORDS: *Gender inequality, online audiences, cover songs, metal music, popular music.*

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the music industry has experienced a big change thanks to the arrival of the Internet and social media shaping how music is produced and consumed (Schaap & Berkers, 2014). Traditional music scenes have moved to online platforms, being an example the cover scene, which for years has helped young performers to propel their musical careers (Plasketes, 2005). Moreover, online audiences have acquired an important role for performers (Baym, 2019) turning into powerful actors and helping performers to succeed in their careers by giving them recognition and legitimacy (Baym, 2019; Berkers & Schaap, 2015). To understand how female performers may gain recognition through digital platforms, many scholars such as Brown (2011) and Miller (2014) frame their findings on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital field. Bourdieu's theory explains that when an individual gains reputation or prestige within a social space, this individual acquires symbolic capital which leads to gaining legitimacy and better opportunities in the industry (Bourdieu, 1993; Schmutz & Faupel, 2010). In the case of female performers, acquiring this type of capital is difficult in some female under-represented genres such as the male-dominated metal scene (Berkers & Schaap, 2018) or gender-stereotyped scenes like popular music (Donze, 2017). After all, gender inequality is present in all aspects of the music industry, especially in music production (Raine & Strong, 2018).

This research seeks to understand gender inequality in online platforms by analysing the audiences' evaluation of female performers on online vocal covers videos, specifically on YouTube. The aim is to see if the acquisition of recognition, and therefore symbolic capital, is possible in music scenes where females are highly under-represented, in this case in metal and popular music. Thus, the following question arises: What are the meanings that can be found in online audiences' comments on male and female YouTube covers of metal in contrast to popular music? This main question entails the following sub-questions:

- How do meanings in online comments differ between male and female YouTube covers?
- How do meanings in online comments differ between the genres of metal and popular YouTube covers?
- Do online audiences encourage certain types of gender stereotypes in metal music in contrast to popular YouTube covers?

In regards to academic relevance, this research intends to fill the gap on how online audiences can help females gain recognition in music scenes where they are under-represented and there are strong ingrained gender stereotypes, adding then to the overall gender inequality in the music industry line of studies. Although there is a vast academic literature that studies how

gender is portrayed and analysed in popular and metal music, few scholars attempt to understand how gender stereotypes are viewed and valued by online audiences, being then the aim of this thesis to contribute to this academic debate. In addition, this study focuses on the online cover music scene, putting the glance on gender inequality in a virtual scene that has not been extensively studied yet, therefore analysing cover scene audiences' evaluation of performers. Moreover, this research makes a comparison between two music genres, being this of scientific relevance as most studies that study acquisition of symbolic capital focus their research on a specific genre and fail to see if the findings can be applied to other scenes and the overall music industry (Miller, 2014; Savigny & Schaap, 2018). Taking this into account, the findings could help understand how gender inequality is present in the online music industry, being this of societal relevance. Studying if certain stereotypes are present in the virtual scenes could give a new scope to the current digital music industry by questioning if the youngest generations that use these digital platforms promote certain society ingrained gender stereotypes or are more aware of it and try to change this. Furthermore, studying if online audiences could help female musicians to acquire symbolic capital in these specific music scenes, could provide new insights to young performers on how to thrive and gain recognition in the current virtual music industry and built a professional career. Therefore, this thesis is relevant for society as it pursues finding out if there is a way of lessening the gap between male and female musicians as for accessibility of opportunities in the business.

In order to answer the research questions and fulfil the study purposes of this thesis, qualitative content analysis has been conducted. This method has been applied on analysing a total of 800 comments from 40 cover videos of popular and metal songs covered by female and male artists on YouTube. Specifically, a thematic analysis has been conducted, as it helped to find the meanings on the comments analysed to understand how online audiences' value female and male cover performances on YouTube and find differences in the evaluations.

To conduct the thematic analysis, first, it was needed to study the relevant academic literature thus far. Therefore, the next chapter is the theoretical framework chapter, in which the evolution of online music and cover scene are contextualized as well as a discussion of different scholars' findings on online audiences' role and behaviour, gender in music production in metal and popular music, and finalizing the chapter with a description of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital and its application on the academic realm. Next, the method chapter, which details the methodology used for this thesis followed by the results chapter that analyses the results of the qualitative content analysis conducted. Finally, a conclusion chapter that gives an

answer to the research questions and finds a connection to the reviewed academic literature, as well as suggesting further research and pointing out the limitations of this empirical research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter deepens into the theoretical dimensions that frame the research of the present thesis. The first section aims to contextualize the role online music production and the cover music genre have in the current music industry. In order to understand the most important aspects of this topic, the evolution from offline music production to online music production is described as well as the role of digital platforms, specifically YouTube. Coming after, an explanation of how and why cover music moved to the virtual sphere. The next section frames online audiences in the music industry, by comparing different scholar's perspectives on how online audiences behave and consume, as well as their role in the music industry. Following, this chapter focuses on one of the main dimensions for the research this thesis conducts, which is sex and gender. Specifically, a conceptualization of the two concepts and how gender is evaluated both in the metal scene and in the popular scene. To conclude the chapter, an explanation of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital is given as well as critical analysis on how different scholars relate this theory to the music industry, with the purpose of gaining theoretical insights to guide the research.

2.1. Online music production and evolution of Cover Music

2.1.1. Evolution of online music production in the music industry

Studies thus far have discussed how music scene production has changed in recent years thanks to the arrival of the Internet and social media (Schaap & Berkers, 2014). Since the 1990s, the emergence of information and communications technology (ICT) and the Internet have impacted and challenged how music is sold, distributed and promoted (Moreau, 2013). Supporting this perspective, Hracs's (2012) empirical study showed that technology has created a new structural and spatial order of independent music production in which individual musicians can make and sell music from anywhere. Therefore, the physical boundaries of traditional music scenes have expanded, as relatively affordable recording material offer musicians the opportunity to produce a professional quality recording studio within their own bedrooms and without having to depend on the financial backup of a record company (Kruse, 2010; Théberge, 2011). Moreover, the development of digital technologies has given musicians the tools to be truly independent, reducing the cost of recording so that it is now accessible to musicians with low incomes (Hracs, 2012). Hence, the two traditional barriers to entering the music market, cost and skill, are removed, resulting in a higher number of musicians entering the industry and functioning as independent producers (Hracs, 2012).

Haynes and Marshall (2018), in a more recent study, add to this perspective by saying that this reduction of entry barriers in digital media offers better opportunities for musicians to become successful and to access a digital marketplace that can sustain an infinite number of niche products. Furthermore, the emergence of social media and ‘direct to fan’ platforms enable artists to communicate and sell directly to their fans, being able to be successful without the support of traditional record labels (Haynes & Marshall, 2018), as Hracs (2012) previously discussed. However, some authors such as Lee et al. (2016) criticize digital transformation by arguing that the offline music record industry suffered from this digitalization by becoming not as profitable as it was. Although more music is being produced, distributed and consumed, this is done at a significantly lower rate of profit (Wasko et al., 2011). This critic is supported by data from the most recent report on the music industry by MCR and Billboard (2021). The report shows that in the music industry of 2020 only 8.5% of the music consumption takes place through physical albums, whereas the rest of the consumption takes place through digital services (Figure 2.1). Still, research findings provide evidence that digital products play a role in promoting physical products, therefore consumption of digital products leads consumers to purchase more expensive physical products, i. e., offline music records (Lee et al., 2016).

Figure 2.1: Share of total album-equivalent consumption by format (MCR & Billboard, 2021)

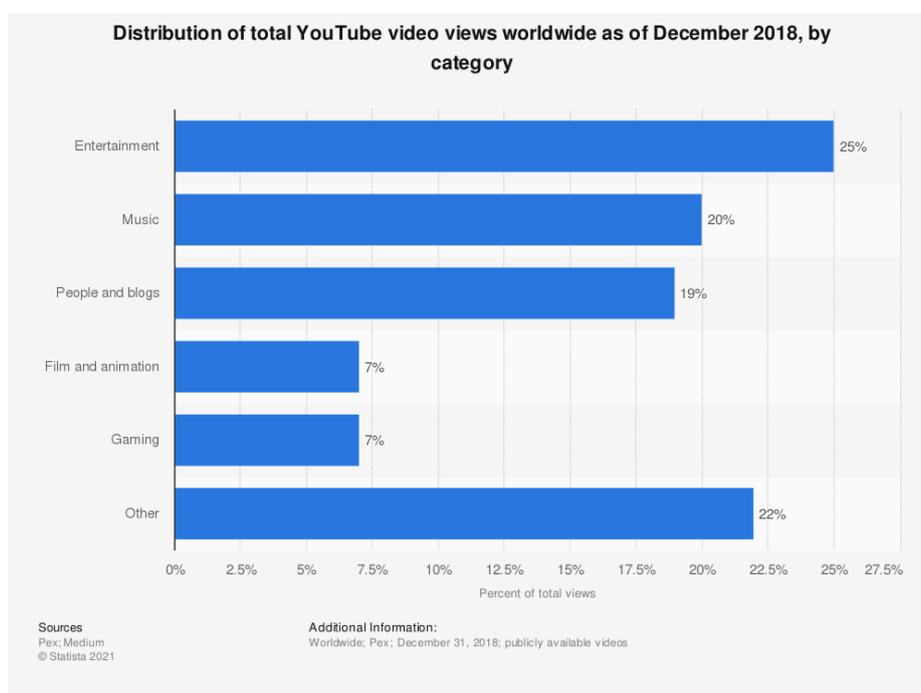


2.1.2. Digital platforms and YouTube

Regarding the utility of digital platforms for musicians, Moreau (2013) discusses that new artists make their music available online for free to boost their reputation and possibly get signed up or to intensify their live activity. Hence, platforms like YouTube, which allow musicians to upload and share user-generated videos, are a good opportunity for artists that want to start in the music industry (Scott Hiller, 2016). YouTube, since its creation in February 2005, has seen rapid growth (Cayari, 2011), becoming the second most visited website worldwide (Alexa, 2021). As of May 2019, YouTube reported 2 billion logged-in monthly viewers worldwide and more than 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute (Tankovska, 2021b). An explanation of this growth can be due to the platform's business model, as free platforms are the most popular amongst consumers comparing to paying platforms. Moreover, consumers are more open to platforms that charge advertisers and not users, (Weijters et al., 2014). Therefore, this could be a reason of why the rapid growth of YouTube as well as an interpretation of why consumers are attracted and consume content through this type of platforms.

In addition, the most popular video content categories on YouTube in 2018 were Entertainment with 25% of views and the Music category in third place, with 20% of views (Figure 2.2) (Tankovska, 2021c). However, the statistical data shows that the distribution of the content available on the platform in 2018 was 10% Entertainment and 5% Music, being the most popular the category of Gaming with 31% of the market share of content (Tankovska, 2021a). Therefore, this data shows that even though music content is not the most popular content to upload for creators, it still attracts a high number of viewers. Furthermore, Weijters et al. (2014) findings suggest that young consumers appreciate the search mechanism of YouTube that allows them to discover new music through browsing platform's recommendations, as one of the reasons why they choose YouTube over other platforms.

Figure 2.2: Distribution of total YouTube video views worldwide as of December 2018, by category (Tankovska, 2021b)



Adding to Weijters et al. (2014) findings, Cayari (2011) supports previous authors Moreau's (2013) and Scott Hiller's (2016) views by demonstrating through a case study the opportunities that YouTube can offer. The author affirms that YouTube can be seen as a "large canvas that allows millions of artists to place their own mark on a digital mosaic" (Cayari, 2011, p. 1). Moreover, this case study suggests that YouTube allows listeners to become singers and consumers to become producers, as they have the opportunity to create new original works and supplement existing ones. Hence, this thesis focuses on YouTube as a platform that has a wide reach of online audiences that view music content. Besides, thanks to its high visibility YouTube offers good opportunities for musicians that want to enter the music industry. It should be noted that even though some scholars studied the opportunities that YouTube can offer, there is a lack of research on the effects that it has long-term on professional careers. Nonetheless, previous studies reflect on specific music scenes and the changes they experienced thanks to the arrival of digital platforms. The next section deepens into these changes in the specific case of the Cover Music industry.

2.1.3. Cover music in virtual sphere

One of the traditional music scenes that has progressed from offline to online platforms like YouTube, is the cover scene in which a cover version “is an alternative rendition of a previously recorded song” (Serrà, 2010, p. 1). For years, cover songs have helped young performers propel their musical careers, as cover music has an inherent commercial appeal (Plasketes, 2005). Moreover, thanks to websites and platforms that allow users to share and present their own cover songs and exchange opinions and discover new music, cover songs have become part of a worldwide social phenomenon (Serrà, 2010). However, even though cover songs can help propel an artist’s career, certain scholars have a different perspective. One of these perspectives defends that some artists that want to enter the music industry post their own original songs before posting cover songs, as they think original songs will help them develop their own identity before they are tied to another artist’s music (Cayari, 2011). This is supported by Green’s (2017) more recent study, which notes that some live popular music performers feel the need to establish their own identity with original works before performing covers.

Taking a look into studies thus far about the cover scene, there are several scholars that help to understand the evolution of cover music and cover artists throughout time (Cayari, 2011; Green, 2017; Plasketes, 2005; Serrà, 2010). However, these studies do not show how the current online cover scene works. There is a lack of research on the evolution of cover music on online platforms in recent studies. Therefore, this thesis aims to study how music audiences of this online cover scene value performances. In order to study that, it is necessary to understand how online audiences behave and whether it is different from traditional music audiences.

2.2. Online audiences in music industry: behaviour and role

Baym (2019) argues that as musicians struggle to find their ways in an internet-mediated music world, audiences gain power and flourish. Moreover, platforms like YouTube enable a variety of social interactions whereby users can choose to friend or subscribe to other channels, comment on or choose favourite videos (Susarla et al., 2012). Susarla et al. (2012) agree with Parameswaran and Whinston’s (2007) research on that the social interaction on these platforms have a dual nature of user participation, which means that it enables content creation as well as opinion formation, something that earlier communities did not provide. Specifically, audiences can distribute and exhibit others’ works, spread the word and watch the gates of popular culture (Baym, 2019). In other words, they “are the ones who make things happen” (Baym, 2019, p. 80). This phenomenon that occurs in digital environments is defined by some scholars as social contagion, where preferences and actions of individuals are influenced by interpersonal

contact, impacting the aggregate diffusion and a spread of behaviours or new products (Susarla et al., 2012). Moreover, social contagion through platforms like YouTube can enable users to gain peer recognition from social interactions with other users (Susarla et al., 2012). The Internet has made online audiences' social interactions more widespread and immediate, making it easier to connect across geographical boundaries (Kruse, 2010). However, the expansion of music distribution through online platforms has also led to an increase in illegal online music consumption (Weijters et al., 2014). Weijters et al. (2014) suggest that the intention to consume music illegally and the willingness to pay for music are driven by the value that consumers attach to the platform's attributes such as price, quality and legality. Today, platforms like YouTube and Spotify allow consumers to access music for free in a legal way, therefore consumers do not necessarily have to decide whether to consume legal music or pirate music. This is relevant, as it helps understand how online consumers behave and what are the key features that drive their decisions when consuming music in the online sphere.

Regarding the role of online audiences, Berkers and Schaap (2015) in their empirical study suggest that the power audiences have through online platforms gives minority groups, that have difficulties gaining recognition in their fields, better opportunities to gain recognition. An example is the case of female covers of metal music on YouTube, where audiences evaluate females on their abilities instead of basing their evaluation on the artists' femininity or sexual attraction, which means that their value as performers is recognized (Berkers & Schaap, 2015). However, both authors do not recognize whether this is a phenomenon that has to do only with this specific sub-genre or whether this evaluation of online performers happens throughout the whole music industry. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this gap and seeks to better understand online audiences' evaluation of gender in the particular cases of metal and popular music. The following section has the purpose to acquire an understanding of how gender inequality has developed in the music industry and contextualize gender evaluation in metal and popular music.

2.3. Gender in music production: gender evaluation in metal and popular genres

An important concept that frames this research is gender in the music industry, specifically in music production. In order to study gender, first, it is necessary to understand what gender is and the distinction between sex and gender.

Social studies have deepened into the study of sex and gender and their role in different fields. Over the years, most scholars of the gender studies field scholars showed a certain agreement on the distinction between sex and gender. Previous studies stated that sex is the

biological distinction of the species, arguing that is a part of nature that is characterized by a natural dichotomy (Delphy, 1993). Moreover, Delphy (1993) affirms that old scholars defended this idea by saying that gender originated as a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy (male/female), which means they thought of gender in terms of sex. However, Delphy (1993) criticized this point of view by saying that what is called sex roles and gender should be recognized as socially constructed rather than biologically determined.

Before entering into a further discussion about how these terms are socially constructed, specifically the case of gender, it is important to know what are the characteristics that define masculinity and femininity. Different scholars base their studies on the distinction that Bem (1974) established for gender roles, understanding them as separate constructs (Feng & Xiu, 2016; Hegarty & Sarter, 2021; Oliffe & Greaves, 2012). Masculinity has been associated with an instrumental orientation, a focus on “getting the job done”, which is associated with assertiveness, competitiveness, independence and dominance (Bem, 1974; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Moreover, Oliffe and Greaves (2012) argue that this is what is called hegemonic masculinity, as most cultures emphasize masculinity as strength, aggression, courage, independence and virility. On the other hand, femininity is associated with an expressive orientation, which means an affective concern for the welfare of others, associated with attributes such as expressiveness, sympathy and understanding (Bem, 1974; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Oliffe and Greaves (2012) argue that all femininities are constructed as subordinate to masculinities, thus gender hegemony is maintained through this subordination. That means femininity is constructed based on the notion that masculinity has the dominant role. Still, these studies lack an understanding of more recent conceptions of masculinities and femininities, as they focus on a historical approach that led to these social constructions. In addition, there is a lack of criticism on these approaches, and they do not dive into the current implications these ideas have. Nonetheless, other scholars tried to fill up this gap by explaining these social constructions and their social implications.

Over the past years, gender has become a core topic of social psychology studies (Hegarty & Sarter, 2021). Scholars have developed this point of view and have attempted to study and understand how gender is a social construction divided into masculinities and femininities. Boise (2016) affirms that there are multiple constructions of masculinities and femininities within any given society and that gender is a malleable social construction, suggesting that there cannot be one gendered ideal. Supporting this perspective, Hegarty and Sarter (2021) in a more current study, suggest that gender is not the sociocultural cause of differences between women and men, but it is the set of implicit rules of social order

constructed. Moreover, Feng and Xiu (2016) affirm that most people behave accordingly to the norms and expectations associated with gender roles and incorporate those norms and expectations into their self-concept. Following this line of studies, Oliffe and Greaves (2012) criticise those scholars saying that when they consider sex and gender in their research they tend to conceptualize the notions of sex and gender contrasting masculine males with feminine females. On that account, the authors suggest “moving beyond the binary” (Oliffe & Greaves, 2012, p. 17), rethinking the previous conceptualizations of gender as strictly social and of sex as strictly biological, arguing that both concepts are socially constructed and therefore subject to change over time. To support this, they discuss that there is a difference in how cultures conceptualize sex variation and that our understanding of sex has changed over time and continues to change. Thus, Oliffe and Greaves (2012) suggest different approaches to conceptualizing gender. They affirm that gender is context-specific and subject to change, however, in almost every society, men are more highly regarded than women and given greater power, access, opportunities and presence in public life. Marini (1990) previously acknowledged this by arguing that biological factors, such as women’s role in reproduction and men’s greater physical strength, have certain effects on society. Particularly, it can define the division of labour in a way that men is put in a better position to acquire and control the valuable resources of their societies, never permitting the emergence of a female-dominated society and constructing gender stratification (Marini, 1990).

The approach discussed thus far of gender roles argues that as a consequence of living in social work, individuals learn the appropriate or expected behaviour for their gender, internalizing conventional and stereotypic gender roles, irrespective of their particular chosen gender (Mahalik et al., 2003). In addition, Oliffe and Greaves (2012) affirm that men, women, and other genders are treated differently and have diverse life trajectories. For this thesis, it is interesting to note the author’s view on how gender roles are related and their social implications, as well as how gender can be expressed. They say that gender is manifested in the ways that individuals style their bodies and carry themselves, as well as how they speak and move, being gender present in particular practices and behaviours (Oliffe & Greaves, 2012). This is what Boise (2016) identifies as performing gender, something that men and women do differently depending on the context. Therefore, it is important to understand how gender is manifested in different contexts, especially in the case study that is the music industry that forms part of a greater field that is the creative industries.

When talking about gender in creative industries it strikes that fields like film, television, the music industry, and the arts present persistent inequalities relating to gender, race

and ethnicity, among others (Conor et al., 2015). Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) argue that this inequality might be due to factors such as employment and wage instability, low or unwaged entry-level jobs, as well as the need for industry networks to succeed, making it harder to enter this industry. Hence, as Boise (2019) affirms, gender inequalities within and across music scenes continue to be a problem. Although there are high-profile women musicians with great visibility, their achievements are not a fair and general representation of the everyday discrimination and exclusion in music life (Boise, 2019). However, Lindemann et al. (2016) suggest that cultural attitudes concerning masculine gender roles are stricter and rigid compared to feminine roles. Still, female artistic workers earn significantly less than males even though men slightly outnumber women in arts working positions (Lindemann et al., 2016). *Annenberg Inclusion Initiative*'s annual report on popular music showed that there is little progress in the past nine years regarding gender equality in the music industry. Their analysis showed that in 2020, 2.6% of producers were female, 12.6% songwriters and roughly 21.6% artists in the 2020 Billboard Hot 100 songs (Smith et al., 2021). Findings of the *Workforce Diversity Survey* by UK Music (2020) highlights a falling representation of female musicians in older age groups, this can be due to certain barriers that exist for women aged 45, which makes it hard for women to stay in the industry as long as men. On the other hand, this survey suggests that two-thirds of entrants to the music industry are now women, but at the senior level the balance changes and 56% of respondents identify themselves as men. That means that there is a steady decline in female representation as the career levels increase in seniority. It is worth noting, that these numbers correspond to specific surveys and the reports aim to highlight broad trends in the industry. Nonetheless, that means that it can not be said conclusively that these numbers are the same worldwide, as these studies are centred in the United States and the UK, lacking a perspective of other industries around the world. Taking this into account, it is necessary to look at how gender is portrayed and valued in specific music genres to gain a better overview. For this thesis, it is particularly interesting to focus on metal and popular music, two genres that have a lot of contrast but share some common ground regarding gender inequality.

2.3.1. Gender in metal scene

As it has been previously discussed, regarding approaches on gender, most authors agree on the clear inequality that is present in the music industry. Raine and Strong (2018) define this inequality as “extreme” (p.1) and point out that the ways in which women are marginalized are, amongst others, through lack of access to spaces associated with music, sexist attitudes, and difficulty to access information and networks. Furthermore, women are

particularly under-represented as performers in genres such as heavy metal and electronic music (Berkers & Schaap, 2018; Hill et al., 2015; Raine & Strong, 2018). Hill et al. (2015) argue that specifically, heavy metal is a genre that has embedded a community that values hegemonic masculinity through certain shared values, norms and behaviours. This view connects with previous studies that argue that there are exclusion practices in metal music that ensure that minorities in this specific genre such as women have difficulty in obtaining high levels of involvement and visibility within the metal industry (Kahn-Harris, 2007).

In order to gain visibility, metal females feel that they need to tone down their femininity and try to act masculine in their actions (acting, playing instruments, using jargon), even though they could never be fully accepted into this male-oriented culture (Nordström & Herz, 2013). Other authors acknowledge that metal female fans tend to adopt either a masculine persona and style of dress, or a hyperfeminine, highly sexualized persona (Vasan, 2011). These authors' views support Miller's (2014) findings, that relate significant advantages with having a male body that easily produces prestige, whereas having a female body or enacting a feminine disposition can diminish metalheads' reputation. In any case, women are judged against a masculine standard, Vasan (2011) exemplifies this with a case in which the vocalist of the death metal band Behemoth praised a female vocalist by saying that "she is the equal of any man". In addition, Nordström and Herz (2013) point out that women in heavy metal culture have to negotiate their value to not fall into the duality of either being considered a goddess, if they have extensive knowledge about heavy metal, or being consigned to being someone's groupie.

2.3.2. Gender in popular scene

Music genres that have a higher presence of female artists compared to strong male-dominated genres such as metal, still have female under-representation, like in the case of popular music. Research thus far has shown that women are especially underrepresented in newspaper coverage of certain music genres, which affects early career success of musicians and establishing long-term reputation (Schmutz et al., 2018). Particularly in popular music, gender significantly affects a performer's likelihood of consecration, as findings from empirical studies focused on popular music have shown (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010). Wang and Horvát (2019), in their attempt to study gender differences in popular music, found through quantitative analysis that artists tend to be associated by listeners with distinct genres and roles based on their genders. Although their findings suggest that there is an identifiable "female sound" in popular music, they argue that male artists still have better-connected collaborators and are being better positioned in the core of the collaboration network (Wang & Horvát, 2019).

Regarding female representations, popular music reflects the “mainstream” representations of gendered and sexualized identities and promotes representations of traditional femininity, like being passive, submissive, and sexualized (Donze, 2017). These representations are what Cramer et al. (2002) relate to gender stereotypes, representing the expectations of what is the appropriate behaviour and roles for both male and female artists. Moreover, Donze’s (2011) study focused on artist types in popular music suggest that there is an association of artist’s sexualization with race and gender, with the argumentation that artists are marketed sexualized due to larger societal cultural frames of gender and sexuality. They affirm that in popular music sexuality is used as a form of objectification that is dominant in this industry. Even though these studies analyse how gender is portrayed in popular music and demonstrate that female representation is related to gender stereotypes, few scholars delve deeper into how these gender stereotypes are viewed and valued by online audiences. Therefore, this thesis intends to better understand how gender stereotypes are represented in digital platforms, specifically YouTube, through online audiences’ evaluation.

Schmutz et al. (2018) developed a coding scheme for a content analysis on their research that focused on how newspapers’ reviews of popular music assess artists depending on their gender. One of the most interesting codes is the code of gender, which compares the salience of gender in the reviews, coding explicit mentions of gender and metaphors that imply gender. Other codes used in this research was mentioning the sexuality of the artist (including physical appearance or attractiveness), the authenticity of the artist, cultural legitimacy that included their popular appeal, degree of professional recognition and level of critical acclaim. Other interesting codes in Schmutz et al.’s (2018) coding scheme were the networks of the artist that included the personal relationships, other artists that contribute or are related as being similar to the musician under review. Finally, they coded through a high arts criterion, which means statements that describe musician as complex, original, serious or intelligent, timeless or universal. Through these codes and content analysis, the authors provided strong evidence that gender could be a key cultural frame when evaluating popular music artists. Moreover, the findings showed gender differences in the discourse when addressing the artists, as critics questioned the female artist creative autonomy, authenticity and artistic value, which leads to the overall aesthetic legitimacy of the artist in the popular music industry (Schmutz et al., 2018). These findings are relevant for this thesis as it gives perspective on how artists can be evaluated and all the different nuances that can be found in these evaluations, as well as suggesting that these gender-related differences could influence the difficulty of developing a professional

career. In addition, the coding frame gives an idea of what aspects scholars consider more important when studying gender differences that can be found in how musicians are evaluated.

2.4. Bourdieu's Symbolic Capital theory in the creative and the music industry

This research not only focuses on gender inequality in the music industry but also on how gender evaluation affects female's career development and opportunity to thrive in the business. In order to see this effect, firstly it is needed to understand how legitimacy and approval are constructed in the music industry. Scholars that study gender inequality in the music industry frame their research with Bourdieu's theory of cultural field to understand how the industry works. Cultural capital is a concept in Bourdieu's theory and explains the process of how low or illegitimate culture can acquire legitimate status through the activities of accredited field agents (Brown, 2011). Moreover, when an individual gains reputation, honour or prestige within a social space it means that this individual acquires what Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1993). Miller (2014) explains how this concept of symbolic capital transforms reputations into resources that give access to other resources, such as having a high profile can facilitate access to work opportunities. High profile means acquiring hierarchal status, which is the principal consequence of acquiring cultural value (Lena & Pachucki, 2013). Even though some researches affirm that artists can acquire both cultural and economic capital, peer evaluations are acquired early in a career before entering the paid artistic labour force (Lena & Pachucki, 2013).

This theory has been applied to different cultural fields, such as Scarborough's (2017) sociological research that centres on how social status systems work in the cover music scene. When discussing Bourdieu's theory, the author emphasizes the perspective that symbolic capital (prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity) is the viable currency in the production field, whereas economic capital is not a viable criterion for distinction (Scarborough, 2017). Moreover, when performing, musicians display a field-specific cultural capital to achieve high status, specifically in established scenes (Lena & Pachucki, 2013). Scarborough (2017) points out that although the bourdieusian theory of cultural production can still be applied to the current music industry, it is necessary to qualify how symbolic and economic capital structure hierarchy in specific types of music scenes. Therefore, this author's study shows that in the cover scene economic considerations play an important role when determining musicians' aesthetic. However, social status continuous being the most important element that musicians seek, as it leads to opportunities, thus, social associations remain important to gain this recognition (Scarborough, 2017). In addition, each specific scene emphasizes certain attributes

as central to social status, in the case of rock cover bands for example it is more likely to emphasize experience and visibility, rather than proficiency and professional presentation that is central to jazz performers (Scarborough, 2017). Furthermore, this study suggests that younger musicians do not share the same artistic idealism as older musicians, which can mean that there is a generational shift in valuation in the music industry. Scarborough (2017) concludes that artistry and aesthetic yields dignity and respect, while status is a result of commercial viability of the artist. The implications of these perspectives might be that gaining cultural value can depend not only on how good the artist can sell but also on an artistic level. These findings add to Lena and Pachucki's (2013) study that affirms that when artists use the same artistic content as their peers is a way to acquire higher status positions within cultural worlds. However, Scarborough's (2017) findings support the contrary, saying that musicians in other scenes view the performance of cover music to be low profile and low-status work, as it does not deal with "serious" or "art" music, lacking then of artistry and cultural value. Hence, it can be seen that scholars have different perspectives on how symbolic capital is acquired, which can be due to the fact that most studies focus on specific music scenes that may have different processes of creating reputation and artistic value. Nonetheless, Lena and Pachucki (2013) propose relevant further research, that must move beyond a local focus and seek to understand how status operates in virtual music scenes, as to how cultural value in each scene may be constructed differently and change with online audiences. In addition, Lena and Pachucki (2013) hypothesize that virtual scenes are more likely to be ordered by aesthetic factors, as they consider fan discourse and dialogue are central to the constitutions of these scenes. This last approach adds to this thesis research as an expectation on how the behaviour of online audiences may affect how symbolic capital is constructed in virtual scenes.

Following the gap in these field of studies, it should be noted that gender analysis of symbolic capital and comparison of different fields is lacking in academic research (Miller, 2014). In addition, the specific case of metal studies has become a legitimate area of studies with a proliferation of the number of scholars that engage with these studies (Savigny & Schaap, 2018), but few scholars aim to move forward with the findings across other music genres. Therefore, this research intends to fill this gap particularly in the metal genre, in which female artists have to work really hard to have their achievements noticed and valued, and they also need to prove that they belong despite their femininity (Berkers & Schaap, 2015; Miller, 2014).

Going back to studies thus far that focus on metal and popular music genres, Huppatz and Goodwin (2013) discuss through Bourdieu's cultural field theory that male and female

embodiments operate as capitals, although some scholars argue that gender is not a capital, but it structures cultural capital within fields (Bennett et al., 2009). However, most scholars agree that the difficulty to gain professional recognition in female under-represented genres such as the metal scene and popular music obstructs obtaining symbolic capital, making it hard for females to enter the business and gain legitimacy (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010).

Miller's (2014) empirical study shows that in the metal scene there is a lack of institutionalized symbolic capital. That means that there are not many official recognized markers (e.g., awards, government grants), but the common markers are word-of-mouth based on implicit standards. In other words, metal fans evaluate metal musicians on familiar criteria like gender stereotypes (Miller, 2014). Still, acknowledging the opportunities digital platforms offer to musicians (e.g. no need for a record label or high income) could mean that to gain entry into the industry and to maintain a career does not only require economic capital, contrary to what Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) suggest. Hence, this thesis seeks to understand if the power that online audiences have on digital platforms can help female musicians to build symbolic capital in music scenes where they are under-represented or if they still end up falling into gender stereotypes canons.

3. Method

The following chapter lays out the methodology carried out to answer the main research question and the derived sub-questions of this thesis. This chapter consists of the research design section, which deepens into the method chosen with its correspondent justification. The next section explains the different steps of data collection that were necessary to gather all the data for the analysis. Finally, the last section expands on how this data was analysed to get the results that are discussed in the next chapter.

3.1. Research design

To answer the main research question and sub-questions the method chosen was qualitative content analysis. Specifically, a thematic analysis of viewers' comments on metal and popular music vocal covers of male and female performers on YouTube. The research design of this thesis has been based on the study by Schaap and Berkers (2014) that conducted a qualitative content analysis for death metal covers on YouTube to see gender evaluation differences in the comments section. In addition, their research focused on studying gender evaluation in only a specific music sub-genre. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, most studies thus far do not aim to see if their findings are present in other music genres other than the specific genre they are studying. Therefore, to add to this line of studies and expand Schaap and Berkers' research, this thesis included a comparison factor of two levels. That means, comparing the meanings of the viewers' comments between male and female vocal covers as well as comparing the meanings of comments between metal and popular songs covers. Thus, comparing gender evaluation in two different music genres through qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis was the most adequate method for this research as it is characterized by describing the meaning of qualitative data, by classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Boeije, 2010; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014; Weber, 1990). Moreover, research that uses qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language, with special attention to the content of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Sometimes, existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that would benefit from further description (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For that reason, Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) approach of directed content analysis was applied. This approach has as a goal to "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). In addition, this thesis includes what Bowen (2006) calls sensitizing concepts, that derive from the review of relevant literature that built the conceptual

framework, being effective in providing a framework for analysing the data and ultimately develop a deep understanding of a social phenomenon.

Taking into account that various scholars from gender studies agree that many content analyses seem to lack theoretical grounding (Rudy et al., 2010), this thesis built the analysis from previous studies' findings. Moreover, as this thesis intends to find the meanings of comments, it needs a method that uses interpretation in its analysis of empirical data, as qualitative research includes (Berkers & Schaap, 2018; Boeijs, 2010). The use of sensitizing concepts can help moving from a only descriptive analysis to an interpretative and explanatory analysis, as concepts give way to themes and themes may lead to theory (Bowen, 2006). When talking about qualitative content analysis, researchers have developed different methods. Amongst these methods, the most suitable for this thesis is thematic analysis. This method aligns with the key features of qualitative content analysis, being flexible, accessible and it can be linked to broader theoretical or conceptual issues (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The latter feature relates to the direct approach that Hsieh and Shannon (2005) discuss and what Schreier (2014) interprets as a concept-driven way of analysis.

Although the focus of this method is on description and is what Schreier (2014) suggests ontologically and epistemologically "naïve", conducting it through Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) directed approach helped reduce this naïve perspective as the design was based on a theoretical framework. When talking about other limitations, qualitative content analysis does not allow to explore multiplicity in meaning and how different meanings relate to each other, such as a method like semiotics do (Schreier, 2014). Still, the flexibility and systematic key features of qualitative content analysis, and its ability to reduce the amount of material to analyse, makes it easier to focus on selected aspects of meaning, which is the objective of this thesis.

3.2. Data collection

Regarding the sample of the research, the units of analysis are the comments found in a total of 40 vocal covers videos on YouTube. Of the 40 videos, 10 of them are metal female vocal covers (Table 3.1) and the other 10 videos are the same metal songs but covered by male artists (Table 3.2). The other 20 videos consist of 10 female vocal covers of popular songs (Table 3.3) and 10 male vocal covers of the same songs (Table 3.4). The units to analyse are the comments found in these videos, which are 20 comments per video reaching a total of 800 comments, the necessary amount of data to get valid results. The sampling process in this research entailed two steps: first sampling the cover videos and second sampling the comments.

Table 3.1: Metal covers interpreted by female performers selected for analysis

Female Metal Covers					
Original song	Original band	Cover artist	Views	Likes	Comments
Fade to Black	Metallica	First to Eleven	4.740.324	77.853	4.204
Toxicity	System of a Down	Nadin Zaqarian	3.379.493	33.996	2.391
Before I Forget	Slipknot	Lauren Babic	1.066.795	36.277	1.504
Drown	Bring Me The Horizon	Messgram	916.599	23.636	733
Hail To The King	Avenged Sevenfold	Halocene	607.293	19.196	977
Narcissistic Cannibal	Korn	Violet Orlandi	400.763	15.683	655
This Fire Burns	Killswitch Engage	Carrie Lester	124.906	1.922	484
Crawling	Linkin Park	Ira Green	120.688	2.333	358
Carrion	Parkway Drive	Charlotte Newell	58.805	1.789	148
Bones Exposed	Of Mice & Men	K Enagonio	34.362	1.354	175

Table 3.2: Metal covers interpreted by male performers selected for analysis

Male Metal Covers					
Original song	Original band	Cover artist	Views	Likes	Comments
Fade to Black	Metallica	MixedUpEverything	1.654.958	47.157	3.671
Toxicity	System of a Down	Brian Mikula	940.258	12.523	801
Before I Forget	Slipknot	Sovereign King	30.470	1.953	94
Drown	Bring Me The Horizon	Philip Strand	132.323	3.840	275
Hail To The King	Avenged Sevenfold	The Ralph	363.125	5.723	614
Narcissistic Cannibal	Korn	Xplore Yesterday	743.918	12.620	1.943
This Fire Burns	Killswitch Engage	Vokill Covers	129.439	2.354	417
Crawling	Linkin Park	Jon Howard	485.450	10.886	1.189
Carrion	Parkway Drive	Archie Wilson	92.940	1.877	390
Bones Exposed	Of Mice & Men	Forever in Combat	201.294	5.422	644

Table 3.3: Popular covers interpreted by female performers selected for analysis

Female Popular Covers					
Original song	Original band	Cover artist	Views	Likes	Comments
Stay With Me	Sam Smith	Hannah Trigwell	37.768.244	359.695	6.493
7 Years	Lukas Graham	Jasmine Thompson	30.305.802	355.041	11.833
Rockstar	Post Malone	Sofia Karlberg	27.021.879	528.358	10.042
Someone You Loved	Lewis Capaldi	Brittany Maggs	14.946.666	224.858	4.016
Bad Liar	Imagine Dragons	Jada Facer	9.320.459	148.968	4.828
All of Me	John Legend	Nicole Cross	8.207.075	91.996	2.134
Perfect	Ed Sheeran	Luciana Zogbi	7.489.124	130.770	6.440
Girls Like You	Maroon 5	Emma Heesters	5.606.162	155.257	4.554
Attention	Charlie Puth	Samantha Harvey	2.802.277	48.846	1.627
Blinding Lights	The Weekend	IMY2	2.243.680	49.805	2.333

Table 3.4: Popular covers interpreted by male performers selected for analysis

Male Popular Covers					
Original song	Original band	Cover artist	Views	Likes	Comments
Stay With Me	Sam Smith	Leroy Sanchez	8.738.740	109.944	3.934
7 Years	Lukas Graham	Travis Atreo	6.584.520	59.306	1.788
Rockstar	Post Malone	Bars and Melody	9.381.675	197.083	10.657
Someone You Loved	Lewis Capaldi	Teddy Swims	16.928.481	226.446	8.693
Bad Liar	Imagine Dragons	Hard Kori	752.163	12.144	688
All of Me	John Legend	Justin Rhodes	4.460.417	57.710	3.678
Perfect	Ed Sheeran	Tanner Patrick	3.586.192	64.999	2.745
Girls Like You	Maroon 5	Sushant KC	510.187	26.552	1.092
Attention	Charlie Puth	Alexander Stewart	2.178.139	64.682	1.967
Blinding Lights	The Weekend	Julien Mueller	807.061	27.655	709

3.2.1. Collection of vocal cover videos

Firstly, the sampling of the videos was done through a systematic search on YouTube using specific key terms. In the case of metal covers, the key terms were “metal”, “vocal”, “cover”, and “female” or “male”. For the popular covers, the same key terms were used except

“metal” which was substituted by “popular”. The results were listed by the number of views (highest to lowest) and then the videos were selected considering different criteria. One of the criteria was to choose songs that are originally interpreted by male artists. The reason behind this is to see how females are evaluated on their abilities when performing male songs and if there is any difference between the meanings on comments when is a male that is covering that song or a female. On that account, when sampling the male versions, it was included in the search terms the song title of the female cover already sampled. Another criterion when sampling the cover videos was to categorize them by the number of views (highest to lowest) and comments, looking for videos that not only had a great number of views but also enough comments to scrape data for the analysis. Therefore, criteria like establishing a time frame of the publication of the videos and geographical space were not applied, as one of the key features of digital platforms is the expansion of geographical boundaries reaching worldwide audiences regardless of their location. Still, a criterion of language was applied, selecting videos that had descriptions in English as well as enough comments in English to be eligible for analysis.

3.2.2. Collection of comments

The second step of sampling was to choose the comments to analyse. As mentioned before, a total of 20 comments were selected from each video. To scrape all the comments a tool named YouTube Data Tools¹ was used (Rieder, 2015), allowing to gather all the comments of each cover to later scrape from that data the suitable units for the analysis. Thus, the next step was to select the comments. These comments needed to fulfil some requirements based on an established inclusion and exclusion criteria to gain reliable results. Hence, the data was organized from most recent comments to oldest, to start selecting from the newest comments as they are closer to the actual reality in the online audience’s evaluation of vocal covers. Another requirement was that the comments included had to mention specifically evaluation of vocal and performing abilities of the artist on the video, as well as other musical skills that could be discussed. Therefore, from the first instance the comments that were not included were the ones that talked about the physical appearance of the artist or that merely showed appreciation or

¹ YouTube Data Tools is a research software developed and maintained by Bernhard Rieder, Associate Professor in Medi Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Specifically, this tool allows retrieving basic information about the video, such as the comments as well as a number of analyses of the comment section (Rider, 2015).

own opinion without specifically mention performers' abilities or skills. However, a general view of the comments collected revealed that that comments related to physical appearance were significant in number and meaning, supported by previous studies that included them in their content analysis (Miller, 2014; Schaap & Berkers, 2014; Schmutz et al., 2018). Moreover, an overview of other excluded comments was noted to get an idea of the number balance between the gender evaluation comments and other types.

3.3. Analysis

3.3.1. Coding frame

After the data collection, analysis was conducted. First, a coding frame was constructed to help select the aspects of the meaning in the comments that were related to the topic (Schreier, 2014). This coding frame was constructed by creating main categories and subcategories. This was constructed in a concept-driven way, which means building the categories on previous knowledge and research on the topic, the derived in specific sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006; Schreier, 2014), to ensure the validity of results. That means that the coding frame was based on the previously discussed theory, specifically, the content analysis conducted by Schaap and Berkers (2014) and the content analysis conducted by Schmutz et al. (2018), as well as further empirical studies on gender evaluation in the music industry, particularly on online platforms. In order to create a valid coding frame, the following categories were applied: categories mutually exclusive, exhaustiveness, and description of categories with definitions and indicators (Schreier, 2014). Comments were segmented into units, as comments are usually short materials, the segmentation was done by turning the comments into formal units. However, it happened that there were comments that addressed two different categories or topics. In this case, thematic analysis was used, to ensure a better fit with the coding frame and ensuring relevance to the research and validity (Boeije, 2010). Thematic analysis, as it offers insight into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set allowed to see and make sense of the collective meanings that were found in the analysis of the comments (Braun & Clarke, 2012), as it is described in the next section.

Table 3.5: Coding frame of the content analysis conducted

Codes	
Type	Advice
	Comparison
	General comment
	Question
	Request
Evaluation	Positive
	Negative
	Neutral
Topic	Appearance
	Future
	Genre specific
	Material/Equipment
	Performance
	Vocal technique
Gender nature	Breaking gender rules
	Gender-biased
	Romantic
	Erotic

As can be seen in Table 3.5, the coding frame was divided into four blocks. The first block includes the codes that relate to the type of comment: giving advice to the artist, comparing the artist to other musicians, giving a general comment as appreciation and/or evaluation, asking questions to the artist or making requests like suggesting the artist to cover other songs. The next block concerns the type of evaluation the viewer gives to the artist: positive, negative, or neutral. The third block coded the topic of the comment, which means which aspect of the video the comment was directed to. There have been different topics identified that were present throughout the data: the physical appearance of the cover artist, talking about the talent and future the artist has, evaluating on specific aspects of that music genre, material and/or equipment that is used, the performance of the artist as in how they move and express themselves, and finally evaluating the vocals of the artist as in skills and techniques. The last block related to the codes specific to gender nature evaluation, which revealed three

different types of gender dynamics. This includes the code of breaking gender rules, which relates to the comments that encourage or indicate different rules from what is established in these music scenes. Following, the gender-biased code, that includes all the comments that show explicitly or implicitly an evaluation based on a gender perspective, either specifying the gender of the artist or stereotypes of that music genre. Finally, the codes that relate to what Berkers and Schaap (2018) consider as male-gaze, either a romantic/love gaze or an erotic/sexualized evaluation. An elaborate description of these codes including examples can be found in the chapter that discusses the results. As has been previously mentioned, the coding frame was based on two studies that conducted a content analysis. Although the majority of the coding scheme is based on Schaap and Berkers's (2014) quantitative content analysis that focused on the metal scene, some concepts and guidance were taken from Schmutz et al. (2018) as it was a qualitative content that focused on the popular scene. Therefore, the coding scheme is based on a quantitative content analysis that focuses on the online metal scene, as well as a qualitative study that is centred on the offline popular scene.

The next step of the analysis was the pilot test, where the coding frame was tried out on part of the material, interrogating the data and asking questions about their meaning, and ensuring that the construction of the frame helped answer the research questions. On that account, during the construction of the coding frame, it was necessary to identify the meanings differently for female and male and for popular and metal music. Thus, in the pilot test, some codes were tested and deleted from the initial coding frame, as there were no comments found related to those (e.g., background scenery, personality), and other codes raised as recurrent and were included (e.g., comparison, future, genre specific). The coding of the comments was conducted through the tool Atlas.ti, which is a software that allows qualitative analysis of large bodies of text (Atlas.ti, 2021). After the coding was finalized for all the data set, the results of each group (female-metal, male-metal, female-popular and male-popular) were analysed.

3.3.2. Analysis of the meanings found in the data

The first step of the analysis was to analyse each group on itself and the meanings that resulted from the comments. As mentioned before, a thematic analysis was conducted, as this method identifies what is common to the way a topic is talked about and helps to make sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Hence, the next phase of the analysis was to review the fully coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes, which means searching for themes and the relationship between them to answer the research questions.

A two-level comparison was the suitable analysis for the meanings found in audiences' comments to answer the research questions. Therefore, the following step was to compare the gender groups within the same music genre. That means, comparison between the meanings found on metal comparing male-female and the meanings found on popular covers comparing male-female. This analysis helped answer the first sub-question, that is: How do meanings in online comments differ between male and female YouTube covers? The next comparison was done between popular covers and metal covers, to answer the second sub-question of the research: How do meanings in online comments differ between the genres of metal and popular on YouTube covers? Finally, the results of the two-level comparison were analysed by finding the common patterns that were present in the meanings found in the audience's comments to answer the third sub-question: Do online audiences encourage certain types of gender stereotypes in metal music in contrast to popular YouTube covers? After having answered the sub-questions, a conclusion was drawn to answer the main research question as a discussion of the findings helped to understand how online audiences evaluate male and female in popular and metal cover songs on YouTube.

4. Results

This chapter explores the results obtained from the content analysis conducted in this study. It is divided into four different sections. The first section lays out the themes and meanings found among the coded comments on female metal covers. It is followed by the analysis of the results from the male metal covers. After these two sections, there is a sub-conclusion that discusses certain themes that are similar in both groups as well as some differences. The next section consists of the discussion of the results from the coding of female popular covers, followed by the last section that analyses male popular covers. To conclude this chapter, there is a sub-conclusion of the similarities and differences found in popular covers. The aim of these sections is to understand how vocal cover artists are evaluated regarding their gender and music genre in order to identify the similarities and differences between the different groups, which allows answering the main research question and sub-questions that are discussed in the next chapter.

Before entering the analysis of the results there are some observations that need to be pointed out. First, when looking for metal covers there was a clear difference in the number of songs covered by men in comparison to women, being the female covers outnumbered by the male covers. However, the opposite happened when looking for popular covers, finding a greater number of popular songs covered by women than covered by men. In addition, the number of vocal covers seemed to be lower when researching metal songs than the number of popular songs. In the specific case of metal covers, it was more common to find metal songs covered only by instruments, generally guitar covers. Finally, when looking at the comments it was clear that popular covers have a bigger audience than metal covers, as the number of views and comments is larger in the popular covers analysed than the metal covers selected. After discussing these overall observations, the chapter continues to examine the results of the comments coded for the research.

4.1. Gender analysis of comments regarding cover songs on YouTube

4.1.1. From *girls are not good enough to they can do what men can do*: Themes related to comments on female metal covers

When analysing the comments on female metal covers, the first remarkable observation is that most of the data are general comments that talk about the vocal ability of the cover artist as well as the quality of the performance. From the data, it can be said that overall, the evaluation of the female metal cover artists is positive ($N=156$), as can be seen in Table 4.1. The most prevalent themes in terms of positive evaluation are the ones coded under gender-biased

evaluation ($N=67$), which in this case it is when viewers name the gender of the artist such as “female screamer” or “female vocalist”. Furthermore, the comments that present this gender-biased evaluation positively do it by either acknowledging the vocal abilities of the singer with like “one of the best female screamers I’ve ever heard”, or comparing it to the original artists with comments like “female version of Chester” and “female Serj Tankian”. Moreover, this gender-biased evaluation is strengthened by comments that express their surprise due to the fact that it is a woman that can actually sing this type of music, being the following some examples of this: “I see a bunch of guys covering the song then I see her doing it and KICK ASS!!”, “you sound better than most guys”, “her screams are amazing for a girl” and “I usually am not a fan of female rock covers but this is perfect”. These comments, even though they acknowledge that the cover singer did a good job and has amazing qualities, still show some prejudice as they say that the cover is good for a girl or did not expect that for a female, reinforcing that it is a male-dominated music scene.

Related to this type of evaluation, there are some negative comments that reinforce the male dominance of metal music with examples like: “female singer was uncalled for”, “sorry but no female on earth can sing this song”, “this is not a chick song”, “you need to leave it to men you not good at this”, stick to covering Taylor Swift, woman” and “could’ve been good, way too feminized though”. This type of comments can be related to the theme of *girls are not good enough*, evaluating female singers from a male gaze which thinks that metal covers should be masculine and only songs for guys, categorizing then female singers in what they consider softer music genres.

On the other hand, there are some comments that can be related to the code of breaking gender rules. These comments usually express that women are capable of singing metal as well as men can. Therefore, there is a prevalent theme named *women can be metal singers* with examples like: “nice to hear female vocals for this one”, “we need more metal female screamers”, “You killed it. I’ve always sort of wondered what a female vocal would sound like on this song, and you’ve fixed it” and “I need to learn how to scream like you”. These comments break gender rules as they encourage more women to be present in this music genre or acknowledge their abilities without specifying that it is a female that is singing, not giving importance then to the gender of the artist. Moreover, there is a specific comment that criticizes other viewers’ gender-biased comments by saying this: “I hate that people say ‘for a girl’, it’s either what you did was good or not”. This comment reinforces the overall theme of breaking gender rules, stating that it should not matter the gender of the artist, rather their skills and performance.

When talking about the male gaze, there are some common themes that resulted from the analysis. Specifically, the sexualization of the artist is present in some of the comments such as “damn you sexy as hell”, “she is beautiful and hot” and “freaking coolest sexy voice ever”. Even though there are comments that eroticise the female cover artists, there are some meanings found that talk about their appearance with a romantic gaze or appreciation of their beauty without showing sexual attraction, such as: “she is just gorgeous woman and singer”, “the singer is so beautiful and has a good voice” and “she’s super cute as hell”. Therefore, some viewers comment on the artists’ appearance and give compliments as well as praising their voices. Still, this can be seen as a way of male gazing at the artists and evaluating their physical appearance as something good when performing metal music.

4.1.2. From *comparison to the original artist* to a *man-to-man evaluation*: Themes related to comments on male metal covers

Regarding the themes related to comments on male metal covers, they differ to some extent from the meanings found on female metal covers. One of the most predominant themes is the *comparison to the original artists* ($N=46$), as Table 4.1 shows. Viewers compare the vocal ability of the male cover artists with the original singer in terms of skills (e.g., “must have been very hard to reach Shadows vocal range”) and sound (e.g., “you sound same as Corey”). The comparison range from covers that are “better than the singer himself”, “for once as good as the original” to cover artists that are “not even close” to the original artist. Therefore, it can be said that the common theme is that the evaluation is based on the similarities with the original artist, rather than their general abilities. That means, the audience generally does not only appreciate the cover artists performance, but they evaluate if the cover singer can reach the original artist’s level in terms of vocal ability and sound.

Another common theme is *vocal technique advice*, which relates to those viewers that give advice to the cover artist on how to improve their vocal abilities or performance. Usually, these comments have a positive tone and are small suggestions on how to make it better, such as “If you wanna sound more like Corey try using less of your nasal passages, you can totally smash it tho!”, and “if you can work a bit on mimics would be perfect”. However, there are some comments that criticize the cover artist hardly, being as an example “mix your vocals up and stop screaming the same pitch over and over” and “lead vocals sound muffled and lazy, open your mouth just... just a bit of honesty, musician to musician”. This theme suggests that viewers either are experienced musicians that know vocal techniques and want to help cover artists to improve, or that viewers feel that they have enough authority to give this type of

advice. Thus, it shows that audiences may have specific knowledge of the genre as they know how to detect and examine genre-specific abilities with examples like: “it’s all about vocals when it comes to metal/rock songs, and this one nails it” or “solid growls but didn’t quite get the screams”. Therefore, it can be said that metal male singers are evaluated on the specific skills that are considered important for being a proper metal music singer, which means not only vocals in general but the correct growls, screams and cleans.

Finally, another theme that is frequent is the gender-biased evaluation found in the comments, specifically the theme that can be named *the man-to-man evaluation*. When coding the comments, the results showed that a big part of the viewers addresses the male cover artists with what can be considered “man talk” terminology, with terms like “dude”, “bro” and “mate”. Thus, this can suggest that male viewers of metal covers evaluate the artists from a colleague perspective, as they address them as if they were friends or even part of the same community. Examples of this can be the following comments: “Your screams bro, your singing. Sick job mate”, “Great screams man!”, “you have mad skills man, keep doing what you’re doing!”, “Dude your vocals sound more like how Jesse sounds, that’s fucking sick dude!”, “Nice dude, really bad ass!” and “Very dope man, and really sick throat you got there man.”. This type of comments could indicate that there may be a feeling of community in the metal scene and that viewers address cover artists as equals or acquaintances, not as someone that is unreachable. However, this also could suggest that there is a clear gender-biased evaluation as the audience specifies that they are talking to another man, and therefore, evaluating them regarding their gender.

Comparison between comments on female and male in metal covers

When comparing the themes found on female and male metal covers comments, there are certain similarities and differences that can be noted. Firstly, even though both genders present gender-biased comments that reinforce certain metal music stereotypes (e.g., toughness, power, screams, masculinity), there are slight differences. Female covers are evaluated regarding their abilities, usually comparing them to what male metal singers can do, with a tone of surprise or appreciation. On the other hand, male covers are evaluated by comparing them to the original artists, in a lot of cases offering advice as a colleague. Thus, certain viewers evaluate if the female cover artists meet the requirements for entering the industry as a singer, whereas when evaluating male artists, it is recurrent that viewers already consider the cover artist as part of the industry. Furthermore, women are evaluated more by their appearance in comparison to men, where the appearance is almost never mentioned throughout the comments analysed, as can Table 4.1 shows.

Table 4.1: Coding results of comments on Female and Male Metal Covers

	Codes	Female Metal	Male Metal
Type	Advice	6	18
	Comparison	23	46
	General comment	183	127
	Question	2	8
	Request	2	8
Evaluation	Positive	156	140
	Negative	32	22
	Neutral	11	35
Topic	Appearance	17	1
	Future	3	5
	Genre specific	52	37
	Material/Equipment	3	6
	Performance	39	30
	Vocal technique	161	180
Gender nature	Breaking gender rules	17	
	Gender-biased	67	49
	Romantic	6	
	Erotic	16	3

Moreover, it is worth noting how relevant the theme of breaking gender rules is present in female metal covers, whereas there is not a single comment in male metal covers. Furthermore, the gender-biased code was only male related, as viewers only used male terminology, not having in any of the comments an explicit female presence. Whereas in female metal comments, there is a clear distinction between gender-biased comments that present a male gaze evaluation and comments that encourage breaking gender rules, by asking for more presence of female singers in metal music. Therefore, male metal comments reinforced the male dominance of the music genre and female covers included both male and female as part of the industry.

Nonetheless, there are some themes that are similar and particular for metal covers regardless of gender (Table 4.2). There is a clear genre-specific evaluation, which means that metal fans have good knowledge of what skills are required to be a metal singer and usually

evaluate the artists bearing this into mind. Viewers explicitly name what type of vocal abilities the cover artists are using (e.g., “the scream is a little bit blackened and that’s very cool”) or even what kind of sub-genre does the song belong to (e.g., “He has a solid voice for the blunt death metal kind of stuff”). Furthermore, both male and female covers had some requests and questions ($N=16$ and $N=4$ respectively), viewers usually asking what equipment or material they are using (e.g., “Programs you’re using?”) as well as how they train vocally (e.g., “how do you do that and doesn’t hurt your voice?”), and requesting certain songs to be covered by the artist. Still, as it can be seen in Table 4.1, the total number of inquiries throughout the comments and the type of comments shows that there is not a recurrent theme in these codes.

Table 4.2: Recurrent themes identified in Female and Male Metal Covers

	Theme
Female cover	Breaking gender rules
	Girls are not good enough
	Male gaze
	Sexualization of the artist
	Women can be metal singers
Male cover	Comparison to original artist
	Man-to-man evaluation
	Vocal technique advice
Both	Genre-specific evaluation

4.1.3. The *good girl*: Themes related to comments on female popular covers

Next, the themes related to comments on female popular covers are discussed. It is important to note that majority of the comments are general comments ($N=176$), as Table 4.3 shows. That means that few viewers give advice, make questions or requests. Moreover, these general comments usually refer to the code related to vocal technique. Among these themes, one of the most predominant is the *sweet and voice of an angel* theme, which evaluates the cover artists in terms of how the voice sounds, categorizing it as “your voice is so lovingly”, “sweet voice” or “angelic voice”. In addition, some of these comments are accompanied by an appreciation of the artist’s appearance, being as examples the following quotations: “Amazing voice and you are so sweet”, “Beautiful voice and you so beautiful too.”, “So beautiful and incredible singer” and “Your voice and you both pretty”. This suggests that one common theme

in female popular covers is the evaluation of both the voice and the attractiveness of the artists, that is that popular singers need to sing sweet or soft as well as be pretty.

Regarding gender-biased evaluation, there is a theme that can be identified as the *good girl* evaluation. This theme means that in these popular cover songs, some artists are evaluated by the audience through a glance that treats them as young girls, implying that they are cute, sweet, and even consider them a “lady”. Examples of this are “sweetie I can’t get enough of your voice” and “good job young lady”. Some comments encourage this good girl stereotype by commenting that the singer should not say bad words (e.g., “with this voice don’t say bad words please”), implying that with that nice voice she must be polite and nice. This can mean that when it is a female singer, the audience has a gender-biased view when evaluating their performance, which may lead to the use of similar adjectives (e.g., cute, nice, sweet, soft) when talking about their skills, performance, and appearance. Hence, comments analysed evaluate female popular singers as sweet and angel voices, that is there is a meaning under these comments that is related to the already named good girl recurrent theme.

When looking at breaking gender rules comments, it can be seen in Table 4.3 that this is one of the less common codes ($N=4$), therefore not relevant themes have been identified. What can be worth mentioning is that there were a couple of discussions about changing the gender of the lyrics from the original song: “I like how she doesn’t change de pronouns” and “it might just be a lesbian version to this person. If the creator of this amazing cover didn’t mean it like that, it’s fine.” As an opposite comment, this viewer said the following: “it just don’t sound right when a woman sings a song written by a guy about a girl and her singing it using the same words”. Regarding this topic, what could be said is that there are some viewers that, when evaluating the cover artist, criticise the changes the artists make to the song, in this case, the pronouns of the lyrics. Although it is not a recurrent meaning found throughout the data, it shows that a minority of viewers pay attention to certain gender differentiation and have an opinion about if it is right or wrong.

Finally, when analysing the comments coded under the male gaze codes it can be seen a clear romanticising of the artists and, sometimes, an erotic evaluation. The evaluation of the appearance has already been discussed when looking at the good girl theme. However, it is important to point out that there is also a recurrent theme that shows more than mere appreciation, as there are viewers that state that they are “in love” with the artist: “perfect crush”, “a voice that can make anyone fall in love”, “your voice is so romantic” and “now I’m in love with a woman that isn’t my wife”. Furthermore, there are comments that come clearly from a male gaze, such as: “if only women could see themselves the way us men do”, “I am a

sucker for blondes, but willing to make an exception” and “you girls are freeing beautiful and always seducing in music covers”. Thus, there are some viewers that sexualize the artist (e.g., “really sexy performer”), whereas most of the comments are more romanticized, as the most recurrent categorization of the artists’ appearance is as “beautiful”. The meanings found under the codes that belong to male gaze evaluation reinforce then the recurrent theme of the good girl, pointing out the beautiful appearance of the female singers and romanticising the whole conceptualization of the artist.

4.1.4. The *handsome prince charming*: Themes related to comments on male popular covers

As well as in female popular covers, the vast majority are positive general comments ($N=185$), therefore few viewers give advice, make questions or requests, as Table 4.3 shows. After analysing the general comments, a recurrent theme was identified, that is the comparison to the original artists or other professional singers. This comparison goes from viewers commenting that the artist is better than the original, sounds the same, to saying that he is not good enough to match the original song. Examples of this theme are the following comments: “You better than Lukas Graham”, “Dude your voice sounds just like Charlie Puth” and “No one can match the level of Charlie”. The meaning that can be found after analysing the comparison comments is that most viewers when comparing popular cover artists to the original song, agree on the evaluation that the cover artists is better than the original.

In addition to the comparison theme, there is another theme that was identified as *voice matches the song*. This theme includes those comments that show genre-specific evaluation, particularly the ones that state that the voice “fits in perfectly with this song”, or that the specific tone and sound of the voice makes it a better cover. When analysing the meanings, viewers usually point out as perfect for the song those voices that are “emotional” and “relaxing”. Other common adjectives used by viewers are “smooth”, “beautiful” and “sweet”. Moreover, it can be said that male popular voices of the covers analysed are usually categorized as “angel voices”, matching the recurrent theme of a soft and beautiful voice that is related to covers of popular songs. Even one viewer commented the following: “songs of the gods played by Jesus himself”. Therefore, a meaning found among these comments is that the artist, in order to have a perfect voice for the genre, needs to sing emotional, sweet and soft. In addition, there is what could be called “sanctification” of the artist, as it is often compared to angel voices, following the beautiful and sweet sound theme.

Regarding breaking gender rules, there are no themes identified, as no comment was related to this code. However, in terms of gender-biased evaluation, the *man-to-man evaluation* theme is recurrent, in the same way that is present throughout the male metal cover songs comments. This theme can be seen in comments such as: “good vocals bro”, “beautiful great singing buddy”, “amazing voice dude”, “nailed it man” and “what a voice mate”. This type of comments suggests that viewers address the artist as a man, being aware of their gender, and treats him as a colleague or friend, even showing a sense of community. Moreover, the comments under this theme emphasize a man-to-man evaluation. That means that they acknowledge that the cover artist is male and that could lead to a gender-biased evaluation of the singers’ performance, in a sense that they are evaluating if the artist fits into certain male stereotypes. Furthermore, only one viewer specified that it is a male cover, saying “first male cover singer that I actually like”, thus viewers do not explicitly show interest if it is a male cover.

When talking about stereotypes, the coding showed a common theme that can be called the *handsome prince charming* theme, which means that some part of the audience evaluated the artist from not only their voice but also their appearance, categorizing the singer sometimes as “dreamy”. Consequently, it can be said that there is a romantic gaze when evaluating the male singers, being as examples: “you’re like a prince charming in a fairy-tale with a magical voice”, “love your charming voice” and “your voice enchanting”. Furthermore, some of these comments are accompanied by an appreciation of the artist’s appearance, being then usual the evaluation of both the voice and the attractiveness of the male artists: “beautiful voice and why are you so cute” and “nice voice and very handsome”. Therefore, the male popular singers need to have a sweet or soft voice as well as being handsome or cute to have a positive evaluation, meaning that these are some criteria that may be necessary to fulfil to enter the popular music industry.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that few viewers commented on the sexual attractiveness of the artist, thus it cannot be said that there is a clear sexualization of male popular cover artists. Nonetheless, some comments like “so sexy husky voice”, “his voice was so sexy” and “so great and sexy”, do not specifically say that the appearance of the singer is sexy, but rather they find the voice attractive. Still, it is not as common as it is in female covers, and the few sexualized comments present on male covers have more of a comedic tone, such as “this guy made me think twice about why I’m straight”.

Comparison between themes related to comments on female and male in popular covers

After analysing the themes related to comments on both female and male popular covers, certain similarities are identified. First, there is a recurrent theme present in the comments of popular covers, that is *the future evaluation*. In popular covers, it is usual to comment on the talent of the artist (e.g., “you have an amazing talent”) as well as expressing the opinion that the artist should have a future in the music career. This indicates that the audience both for male and female covers recognize that the artist has possibilities to make it into the music industry, with comments such as: “Is he signed to any label yet”, “can’t wait to see you become famous” and “give this guy a signing contract”. Moreover, some viewers state that the singers are “underrated”, that they “deserve more recognition” and wish them to be “very famous and popular”. Comments like “she deserves so much more than just an internet celeb” indicates that there are viewers that think that YouTube is not enough for the artist and that they deserve to develop their talent in a professional career. Throughout the comments, it can be found opinions on how this could happen, either going on talent shows like “America’s got talent” or through the following suggestion: “make him big on YouTube and he’ll be big in the pop industry too”.

Table 4.3: Coding results of comments on Female and Male Popular Covers

	Codes	Female Popular	Male Popular
Type	Advice	2	1
	Comparison	15	12
	General comment	176	185
	Question	3	1
	Request	2	1
Evaluation	Positive	179	181
	Negative	5	8
	Neutral	15	9
Topic	Appearance	43	16
	Future	14	17
	Genre specific	6	7
	Material/Equipment	2	6
	Performance	18	37
	Vocal technique	174	167
Gender nature	Breaking gender rules	4	
	Gender-biased	37	46
	Romantic	12	3
	Erotic	18	11

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the comparison of popular covers is that it is not common to give advice to the singer on how to be better or improve certain skills.

However, certain viewers show some genre specific knowledge, such as if the type of voice fits the song. Examples of this are quotations like: “baritone power”, “your voice is so delicate and beautiful, fits in perfectly with this song” and “your high hits, they’re pitch perfect”. Therefore, viewers have a clear opinion on how the songs should sound and if it is appropriate for the type of music the artist is covering, specifically if it fits certain popular music standards. In addition, it seems that the audience knows how to identify if the cover uses certain material or equipment to apply to autotune the song. In the few cases that this is evaluated, viewers are critical and explicitly state their disagreement on using autotune, with comments such as: “they sound so much better without autotune” and “I love this because is not heavily edited/autotuned like 90% of the covers on YouTube”.

Regarding differences between female and male cover artists, although both are evaluated on their voice as well as their appearance, this is more often in the case of female covers, as Table 4.3 shows. The previous analysis shows that women need to fit into the good girl theme whereas men fall into the prince charming theme (Table 4.4). Still, both genres are categorized in most cases as having a nice, smooth, soft or beautiful voice, as well as being pretty or handsome (Table 4.4). Moreover, their voices sometimes are considered “angel voices”, which corresponds to the recurrent themes found on popular covers as beautiful and perfect voices. When audiences evaluate the artists’ physical appearance, it is usually done through a romanticized glance, following the good girl and prince charming themes, and in few cases, there is an explicit sexualization of the artist. However, when the latter happens is more recurrent amongst the female popular covers than the male covers.

Table 4.4: Recurrent themes identified in Female and Male Popular Covers

	Theme
Female cover	Good girl evaluation
	Romanticized artist
	Sexualization of the artist
	Sweet and voice of an angel
Male cover	Handsome prince charming evaluation
	Man-toman evaluation
	Voice matches the song
Both	Comparison to original artist
	Future evaluation
	Genre-specific evaluation
	Beautiful and sweet sound

5. Conclusion

This final chapter aims to go over the main findings of the content analysis in order to answer each of the sub-questions, which leads to answering the main research question of this thesis. Therefore, in the following discussion of the results, the differences of meanings are compared between female and male covers, as well as metal and popular covers, ending in a conclusion on how online audiences evaluate cover songs on YouTube. The next section points out the implication of the findings and their theoretical contribution, suggesting further research in this line of studies. Finally, the limitations of this research are discussed.

5.1. Discussion of results

5.1.1. Differences of meanings between female and male covers

In order to answer the first sub-question, that is, how do meanings on online comments differ between male and female YouTube covers? It is necessary to discuss the results of the content analysis comparing female and male covers.

The first conclusion regarding gender that can be drawn is that only female covers had comments that could be related to gender rules, encouraging more presence of women in the music industry, or evaluating their abilities in comparison to men. Thus, it could be said that audiences believe that there should be more women in the music industry and in their evaluation, they acknowledge their talent and worth. Relating this to the theoretical framework already discussed, as online audiences acknowledge the difficulties for women in the music industry and encourage them to follow a music career, it can be easier for women to acquire symbolic capital through online performances of cover songs on YouTube. However, it is true that in certain cases women are evaluated in comparison to the original song, thus comparing if they reach the male standards of that song, sometimes being surprised or impressed that women can do what man can do. While this means that female covers are positively evaluated, this still shows a standard in the music industry that is based on male performances, supporting Oliffe and Greaves's (2012) view that masculinity has the dominant role when constructing gender. Moreover, these findings also support Vasan's (2011) research that exemplified how women are judged against a masculine standard. It should be noted that, in the case of metal, some viewers consider that females should not cover metal songs, arguing that this type of music is not for them and highlighting that metal should stay a male-dominated scene.

Regarding men, even though it is true that they are also evaluated in comparison to the original artist, in some cases viewers give advice to the artists as a colleague (musician to musician), implying that the male cover artists are already part of the industry. Therefore, compared to the comments found on female covers, viewers' comments suggest that male artists do not need to work as hard, having easier entry barriers through posting cover songs on YouTube. The latter confirms the current difficulties that women face when they enter the music industry, in comparison to men, as different scholars have studied (Boise, 2019; Conor et al., 2015; Lindemann et al., 2016). Thus, it is still easier for men to create respect and therefore, symbolic capital that can lead to building a professional musical career. In addition, even though digital platforms can help to make connections (Haynes & Marshall, 2018; Hracs, 2012), something that Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) consider essential to enter the industry, the findings of this thesis suggest that men still have it easier than women to create connections with other musicians and boost their reputation.

Finally, another difference found in the meanings on the comments of male and female covers is that female artists' appearance is evaluated on more occasions than men. Moreover, even though sexualization is not common throughout the data analysed, it can be said that it is more recurrent in female covers, with being men more romanticised and women more eroticised. Consequently, sexualisation is still present in the industry when evaluating female artists and online audiences keep on encouraging the sexists' attitudes that scholars such as Raine and Strong (2018) consider a way of women marginalization. Still, it is important to note that this sexualisation was present in few comments throughout the analysis. Therefore, this could confirm Berkers and Schaap's (2015) findings, that it is more common for audiences to evaluate females on their abilities instead of basing their evaluation on sexual attraction, recognizing then the artist's value.

5.1.2. Differences of meanings between metal and popular covers

The results of the content analysis comparing metal and popular covers are discussed below, to give an answer to the second sub-question of this thesis, which is, how do meanings on online comments differ between the genres of metal and popular YouTube covers?

Firstly, it is important to note that there were gender nature comments found in both metal and popular covers on YouTube, then it can be said that gender-biased evaluation is present in both music genres in the virtual cover scene. Moreover, another similarity found in the meanings between metal and popular covers is that there is a genre-specific evaluation, in which viewers show good knowledge of how either popular or metal music should sound. Thus,

evaluating if artists fit in the metal sound criteria (e.g., toughness, screams, growls) or popular sound criteria (e.g., sweet, soft, smooth). If they do so, then the cover artist shows the ability to reach the genre-specific standards that the online audiences set to be a good performer and enter the music industry. Taking into account Lena and Pachucki's (2013) findings that musicians display a field-specific cultural capital to achieve high status, it could mean that performing these genre-specific criteria is the way artists can gain recognition and value in these established scenes, as audiences confirm the value of displaying these norms.

Regarding differences, it can be said that it is more common for popular audiences to comment on the future of the artist than for metal audiences. This could imply that there are more opportunities for popular cover artists to build a career as online audiences give more reputation to these artists by acknowledging their value in the music industry. This reputation that popular artists gain is boosted by the fact that popular covers have more reach throughout online audiences, therefore having higher profile. Taking into account that having a high profile as well as reputation and the recognition of talent are great resources to facilitate access to work opportunities (Bourdieu, 1993; Brown, 2011; Miller, 2014), it can be said that popular cover artists have greater opportunities than metal artists, as audiences recognize more often their value.

Another interesting difference found between popular and metal covers is that physical appearance evaluation is more recurrent in popular covers. Particularly, findings suggest that in popular music having a good physical appearance (i.e., pretty, handsome, beautiful, cute) is a necessary criterion to succeed in the industry, whereas in metal covers this is barely acknowledged. In addition, certain sexist attitudes can be found both in popular and metal covers. However, sexualization of the artist is more common in popular covers, supporting Donze's (2017) findings that suggest that popular music promotes traditional feminine representations, such as the *good girl* theme found through the content analysis conducted. Moreover, it should be noted Lena and Pachucki's (2013) hypothesis that virtual scenes are more likely to be ordered by aesthetic factors as well as fan discourse, that can be related to the findings of this thesis as fan discourse promotes the importance of aesthetic factor such as physical appearance.

5.1.3. Online audiences' evaluation of cover songs on YouTube

Finally, the main conclusions resulted from the two-level comparison conducted are discussed in order to give an answer to the third sub-question, that is do online audiences

encourage certain types of gender stereotypes in metal music in contrast to popular YouTube covers?

The answer to this question is not a simple dichotomy answer, as there are different dimensions found when comparing both genres and genders. The first dimension worth noting is that even though there is a recurrent discourse about breaking gender rules, online audiences still encourage certain metal stereotypes, especially in the case of female cover artists. When talking about male artists in this genre, they still need to fulfil the genre-specific stereotypes, however, they are based on the male dominance of metal and male stereotypes, such as power and strength. This supports scholars' findings on the common stereotypes found in society when talking about masculinity, that is dominance, strength and aggression (Bem, 1974; Oliffe & Greaves, 2012; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Moreover, the man-to-man evaluation as well as how recurrent it is giving advice to other male artists shows that men are more focused on what scholars name "getting the job done". They are competitive and want to show dominance in the music field by giving advice sometimes implying that the viewer is superior to the artist cover. This dynamic is not present in popular covers, as the stereotypes encouraged by online audiences are present both in female and male covers, such as smoothness and softness as well as having a good appearance. Nonetheless, sexualization is present in both genres and is encouraged more for female artists than male artists, reflecting the mainstream representations of gendered and sexualized identities (Donze, 2017).

The answer to this question serves as a roundup of the previous sub-questions to give a better overall perspective of the findings to answer the main research question, that is, what are the meanings that can be found in online audiences' comments on male and female YouTube covers of metal in contrast to popular music?

The main meanings found are that in metal music female cover artists are acknowledged and valued as metal singers, therefore are able to construct symbolic capital that facilitates their access to the music industry lessening previous barriers, such as the male dominance in the music genre. Still, this male dominance is currently recurrent in online audiences' meanings, as they show gender-biased evaluation based on certain male stereotypes. Moreover, in the case of popular music, creating symbolic capital is even easier than in metal music, therefore having better opportunities to gain legitimacy and develop a professional career for both male and female musicians. On the other hand, female artists in some cases are still sexualized and the male gaze evaluation is clearly present on online music scenes. This implies that even though in some ways it is easier for female artists to enter the music industry, it

continues to be harder for women than for men as they are subordinate to specific stereotypes ingrained in the mindsets of music fans, which keeps gender inequality a prominent phenomenon in this industry. Thus, online audiences' evaluation shows progress in gender inequality and lessens the gap helping the entrance of women to the music business, as online audiences more and more are gaining power and presence together with online platforms.

5.2. Theoretical contribution and further research

The main contribution that this thesis has made to the academic research thus far is a better understanding of how online audiences evaluate cover artists on online platforms in the popular and metal scenes. Moreover, this thesis adds to the studies on gender analysis, giving some insights in how gender and its stereotypes are perceived by online audiences by comparing two different music genres, something that some scholars affirm is missing in this field of studies (Miller, 2014; Savigny & Schaap, 2018). It has been previously discussed that few scholars have deepened in recent years into how the cover scene moved to online platforms. Therefore, this study contributes to this line of studies by giving a better understanding of how online audiences interact with the artists that post content online, specifically in the case of the cover scene on YouTube. Finally, an important contribution is to Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, as this thesis applied the theory to better understand the implications of online audiences' evaluation on metal and popular musicians' careers and still finds relevant how value can be created by gaining recognition through audiences' evaluation.

Considering the theoretical contribution of this thesis, some suggestions can be made on how to conduct further research in this field of studies. It would be interesting to compare more music genres, in order to see if the findings are recurrent in other scenes or how different fields evaluate gender. In the same line, as digital platforms are proliferating as well as musicians using them as a way of sharing their music, it would be interesting to add other digital platforms to this research, to see if audiences evaluate differently depending on the platforms. Regarding methodology, conducting a quantitative content analysis could add a better perspective on how frequent certain themes are and gain a quantitative result to numerically complement the current research. Another interesting further research that could be done is to interview cover artists (male and female), that want to enter the music business. This could provide insights on what challenges they face, their relationship with digital platforms, and most important if they suffer gender-biased evaluation throughout their attempt to enter the music industry.

5.3. Societal implications

The findings of this thesis help to understand how gender inequality is present in the online music industry. This is of societal relevance as it shows that there are certain stereotypes still present in the music industry and that online audiences keep on encouraging performers to fit into these stereotypes both in metal and popular music. Moreover, a new scope can be found in which the youngest generations that use digital platforms, even though they promote certain society ingrained gender stereotypes, can show awareness of gender inequality and encourage a change, especially in the case of metal music. Furthermore, the findings give new insights that are relevant for young performers that want to enter the music industry. Among these insights, it has been discussed that if female performers want to thrive and gain recognition in metal music, they need to demonstrate that they have the same skills as men, as they are evaluated in comparison to male musicians. This makes it harder for women to thrive and gain recognition. Therefore, it is of societal relevance to understand that even though there is progress in how female musicians are evaluated in gender-biased terms, they still have to fight against the industry's male standards and work to gain recognition under the male gaze that is recurrent in online music sphere. However, it is clear that online audiences are starting to make a change and showing awareness of the gender gap, encouraging female musicians to enter the industry and wanting them to have the same opportunities that men have in the business.

5.4. Limitations

Regarding the limitations of this research, there are multiple methodology aspects that should be noted to measure the scope of the thesis. Firstly, the number of comments analysed is limited, analysing only twenty comments per video, being sometimes repetitive comments. This can be interesting in the case of a quantitative analysis, however, for a qualitative content analysis, it would be better to have a broader range of types of comments, finding perhaps more meanings and themes on online audiences' comments in that case. Thus, with this analysis there is an understanding of the meanings, still, it does not give a proper view of how recurrent the themes are, which could help explain how important the meanings are to draw better conclusions. Another limitation of the analysis conducted is that the coding was done only by one person, being then more susceptible of a bias in analysing the comments and coding them. Having another researcher code part of the comments when building and testing the coding frame would have given greater validity to the results of this research. Time limitation is an important limitation worth noting, as the sample size choice could have been bigger if there

would have been more time to conduct the study, as well as having a deeper analysis of the meanings. It can be considered a limitation that the analysis was only done in two music genres, not being able to connect the findings to the overall music industry. Finally, there is one important aspect that limits the extrapolation of these results, which is the geographical limitation. Analysing only English-speaking covers and not being able to identify the location of the artist cover as well as the viewer, cannot give a perspective of if these findings are only applicable to English speaking countries or could also be recurrent in other music industries around the world.

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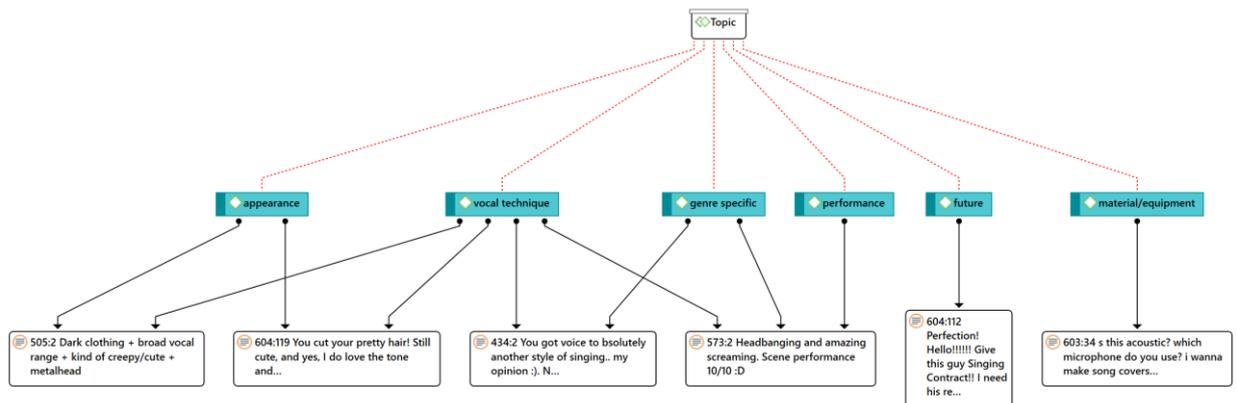
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Appendix A. Code tree: Overview topic code with examples



Appendix B. Code tree: Overview gender nature code with examples

